

Interview with Morteza Varzi on Gholamhosein Banan

By Peggy Caton

Los Angeles, California, September 26, 1986

Tape 1 Transcription:

Radio Program Commemorating Banan

Varzi Interview on Banan Tape 1

Radio program, Friday, March 7 1986, Radio Iran in Los Angeles, memorial tribute for the late sing Gholam Hosein Banan, who passed away on February 27, 1986. Farhang Farrahi was the interviewer, with Mr. Morteza Varzi and his brother, Abol Hasan Varzi, and Shahbaz paying tribute to Banan. The following is a provisional translation.

At first, the program featured a recording of Banan singing, "Deyleman". That was followed by a previously recorded interview with Banan about his childhood and how he started singing.

Banan: From childhood I was interested in *ta'zie*. I went there not because of religious motives; I didn't know what *ta'zie* was. I went there because of the thick-necked singers. I went to listen to their singing. In our neighborhood there was a *tekye* of Shahzadeh Haji Baba o-Dowleh. Horses would go into his house. He had a big house; he had a big *tekye*. He went often to the *tekye* of this man.

Interviewer: Do you have any memories of your start in singing?

Banan: My father, though he was a good singer himself, he never wanted to perform and sing and likewise he didn't want his son to be a singer and didn't allow him to sing. Once I was in bed with a high temperature (when children became sick they become more dear). Once my father was at my bedside, I pretended I was delirious and I started to sing in *shur* and my mother told me later on my father was crying listening to my song. I asked for my father's permission to take singing lessons and since I knew my father would not allow this, I said I don't want to start a singing career. I'm going to school now. I'm just curious about singing. Then my father said, if you promise not to try to be a singer, later on I will assign my favorite singer to come and teach you and that was Zia Zakerin (Sheykh Zia). My father brought Zia Zakerin and started teaching me. Gradually I learned singing and after that it was Naser Seyf.

Announcer: The news was brief. Banan died. And with the sudden death of this king of *avaz*, lovers of Persian music and all friends and admirers of Banan are feeling sad and mournful, including Dr. Shahpar Esfahani, whose poetry was recited at the beginning of the program. With the death of Banan, a sound was extinguished in a small house in Jamal Abad¹, an *avaz* which had for half a century been admired by the mass of the people, a sound which was free and sincere and that's why it found so much favor among those who knew him closely and those who felt the sincerity and purity from his voice, a sound which Shajarian describes as was heard and enjoyed throughout the country. This is the voice with which a generation came into being, enjoyed it and dies with it. The sound that as long as poetry and sound continue to live in Iran will not be forgotten, will be treasured in the hearts of all coming generations. That's why Ruhollah Khaleqi the great musician and historian believed and said that it has taken hundreds and hundreds of years to bring something like voice of Banan into being and it may be hundreds and hundreds of years has to pass before another such voice as Banan can be created.

What is the secret of all this permanency of this voice of Banan and what is the secret of the penetrating and soothing effectiveness on people's hearts? What attracted people's minds and hearts to this voice? Hasan Shahbaz, a literary scholar and 30-year friend of Banan:

Hasan Shahbaz: Banan for me was the shining face of Sa'di, because when Sa'di said that you raise the dead, Sa'di with your sweet speech, it is not certain whether it is the parrot at the time of eating sugar. Banan was that sugar-eating parrot. When Banan sang Sa'di's ghazal, he sang it such that if Sa'di came out of his grave he would sing it exactly the same way. Banan was for me the shining manifestation of

¹ Part of Tajrish

Hafez. Hafez, who himself had a good voice, in his own words said, “I heard from the harp of Venus that was saying at dawn, I am the slave of that sweet-tongued and sweet-singing Hafez”. When Banan sang a ghazal of Hafez, “The minstrel of love has a wondrous instrument and melody, the pattern each tune that he plays is a road to some place”. “The world must not be devoid of the cry of lovers (*‘osháq*), For it has a joyful sound and a cheerful melody.” It came to me that this Banan is the same as Hafez, that if he were alive, he would have sung this ghazal with the same eloquence and beauty. Or when he says, “Saqi, brighten our cups with the light of wine, Sing, Minstrel, the world is now as we wished”. This minstrel, this minstrel of love, is that same Banan.

Announcer: Banan was indeed cognizant, he knew for sure that the pulse of Persian *avaz* is beating in Persian poetry. In this spirit, he began to study Persian poetry. He was of the belief that the greatest example of Persian thought and legacy was found in poetry, especially mystical poetry, which was the representative of the perfection and completion of Persian culture. In this way, mysticism, with the depth and breadth of its worldview, attracted the mind and spirit of Banan. In truth, he was a bridge between mysticism with music and *áváz*. Thus, to his *áváz* listeners, he gave the opportunity to fly toward the heaven of the expanse of the music of Iran. Abol Hasan Varzi, praiseworthy contemporary poet, who was one of Banan’s longtime friends², describes the specialties of the sound and *áváz* of Banan as follows:

Abol Hasan Varzi: Banan came from a prominent old family. His father was a statesman, was from the nobility of the Qajar court, came from Mazandaran. He played tar well and had a good voice. His mother, who also came from a prominent family, played the piano well, and at the time when girls didn’t have the right to go to school, the fact that she learn to play the piano was due to the the open-mindedness of her family. So Banan from childhood was brought up in an atmosphere of music, instrument and voice. His father sang and played the *tár* and his mother played the piano. However much, in my opinion, Banan’s voice can be compared with Zelli³, but still his style of *tahrir*⁴ was particular to him, that others could not imitate. Shajarian, though he is a famous singer, one day told me that whenever he listened to Banan’s voice, he would cry. He said, one day I picked up one of his recordings and went to Qazvin. On the road from Tehran to Qazvin I listened to the tape 20 times to imitate and learn and sing a *tahrir* and I couldn’t do it. This admission was told to me by Shajarian himself.

Announcer: Iran has recently lost a number of prominent traditional musicians and singers: Esmail Mehrtash, Yusef Forutan, Said Hormozi, ‘Abdollah Davami, Ali Naqi Vaziri, Javad Badi Zadeh, Jalil Taj Esfahani, Adib Khonsari and now Banan, great man of music who in the words of Morteza Varzi, music research scholar:

Morteza Varzi: I started music at age at 1316 *shamsi*, under guidance and encouragement of my brother⁵. I was very lucky to quickly come to become acquainted with the singers of the day, like Zelli, Adib Khonsari and later Banan. With the late Zelli, in truth, we were neighbors, and in the evening, whenever he said his prayers, he came into the yard of his house and sang for a while, while my brother, who opened his window overlooking Zelli’s yard and who played tar very well, accompanied him. From

² Met in 1305

³ Reza Qoli Mirza Zelli

⁴ ornamentation

⁵ Abol Hasan Varzi

that I became acquainted with a good voice. Then it was Adib Khonsari who once told me when I performed for him, he advised me, now that you're doing music on an instrument, do something that others haven't done so far. Try to bring vocal pieces into your performances. He told me to try to answer the singer's line exactly and I did this, both with Khonsari's voice and with Banan's. In this way, I became acquainted with the characteristics of the production of Banan's sound. In any case, before Banan sang, when Banan chose a ghazal, notwithstanding that he knew all of the ghazals of Hafez by heart, he would for a time flip through the pages of his booklet until he found one that sat well with him and he would murmur it and then he would begin to sing, in truth brought it to fruition.

Announcer: Mr. Hasan Shahbaz, in the words of Morteza Abdul Rasuli, renowned calligrapher and music scholar, who one day was the best student of Habib Soma'i on santur, related that Banan preserved the fine points of all the well-known singers, but more than all was influenced by Sadr Motakalemin⁶ whose sound was once exalted. In summary, because of his profound voice, he will be a light for future singers.

Hasan Shahbaz: Gholam Banan, master of Persian music, would never use a sad line of poetry in a happy *gushe* or vice versa, so the ghazal he chose would definitely fit the *dastgah* and the lines would definitely fit the gushes. His *tahrirs* had a special style, he just didn't try to use fillers to fill out the line. He knew where he should use *tahrir*, where he should not use it, because he studied for many years with Colonel Vaziri and Ruhollah Khaleqi, with all the masters. Banan was educated. Banan was, following the words of Hafez, "Pure essence is required for becoming worthy of grace, otherwise, not every stone or clay becomes a pearl or a coral".

Announcer: The program was begun with the elegy by Shahpar Esfahani and now with the elegy of Abol Hasan Varzi we end the program.

Abol Hasan Varzi: [recites elegy to Banan]

Music

Morteza Varzi Interview on Banan Tape I: September 26 (or 25?), 1986

P: We're talking with Mr. Morteza Varzi, this is making it sound very official here. I don't even know what day it is, September 1986, September 26, about the life of Gholam Hosein-e Banan. And we've compiled some evidence here and we're going to see what needs to be added. So, what in this story, first of all, what errors did you find?

V: Number one, that his first wife was Col. Vaziri's sister, not daughter.

P: Do you remember her name?

V: No, but I can remember, probably later on. Anyway, his first marriage was to Colonel Vaziri's sister. She was a very nice lady, but the only problem she had was she was very much fond of gambling and partying, actually. Their divorce was on a very friendly basis. They just decided to separate. Because, she was very jealous and, in the meantime, she didn't have much time for him. And he as a singer, you

⁶ Possibly referring to Zia Zakerin, a rowze khan. who was Banan's first singing teacher

know, handsome, and going to all these parties, there were lots of girls, lots of ladies after him and she was very jealous. And they always had fights at home and eventually decided just to separate.

P: How long did their marriage last?

V: I don't know exactly. But I know they had one daughter. That was his first child. But she was on a friendly basis with him. Even after she married to a Shirazi, young man. And they lived in Shiraz, but when Banan had the accident, she and her husband moved to Tehran, just to take care of Banan. She was always at the bedside of Banan. And her husband never bothered them. And she was really a nice lady. In a way, when she talked, she was happy with her second marriage, but she always missed the days that she spent with Banan. And she was sorry because of those fights. Because they never had much chance to get together, except late in the morning or late in the evening. And it always started with a fight, you know, and things like that.

V: And his second marriage was a girl, she was very nice, she was a painter, she played the santur, she was very emotional and she was really in love with Banan. And again, the same thing happened because she had to stay home all the time and he was going to parties. And jealousy. Same reason. For the same reason this marriage also was a failure, didn't work out.

V: And then the third marriage. This time, Banan decided to marry a girl from a very low class who would have no demands on him. Because you've been to Iran, you know that the *bazari* people, the people of the *kuche-o bazar*, their wives believed that their husband is their god and he's free to do anything. And this one worked out but the only problem was that she did not know who Banan was—and for her Banan was just a man. She brought new problems into his life. Because this time, if she was angry for any reason, she would not use her tongue, at times she would just pick up a knife. One day, we going on *Sizdeh Bedar*. Because Banan was living across the street from us, so he was supposed to come and we were all getting ready to go for *Sizdeh Bedar* and then we were all waiting outside. All of a sudden Banan walked out of the alley into Tusi Street and he passed the butcher's shop. And all of a sudden, Mrs. Banan, barefoot, was running after him, walked into the butcher's shop, picked up a butcher's knife, and attacked Banan from behind. If the butcher was not there in time, she could of stabbed him from behind. And, of course, that was the end of the third marriage.

V: The problem she had, I was there, I noticed it sometime, at that time somebody had decided to print all these new songs that came out, that was the beginning of the cabaret type of music, young people singing songs which was not even music. And somebody printed them, so they announced it, *tasnifha*, something like that. And then she would run barefoot down the street to buy these *tasnifs* and sing them day and night even in front of Banan. But Banan didn't care as he wasn't home much anyway. But then this last scene...

P: So, she was jealous, too, but in a different way. She was jealous of who he was.

V: Right. The others appreciated him but still there were women and they thought that he was having affairs with other people, or at least suspected, asked him questions. And he didn't want to answer them because when he comes home, he was normally drunk, wanted to go to bed, didn't want to go to court.

P: Well, how long did each of these marriages last?

V: He had a son from the third one.

P: but he had nothing from the second marriage.

V: the second marriage, no. it didn't last long, actually, it was almost maybe two years, a year and a half.

P: and the third marriage was how long?

V: Well, I'll have to be specific and find out. Approximately, in 1922, when he started his career, he was married to Vaziri's sister. And his second marriage was in something like 1932, 33. And the third marriage was almost immediately after the second one, almost. She was a good-looking woman, she was the kind of woman he like, a little bit pleasantly plump, and beautiful eyes. She was beautiful, actually, but she didn't know how to take care of herself. She was very sloppy, and she knew that she was beautiful because most of Banan's friends had told her and it had given her a false image. That she thought that she was somebody. In the first place she was Banan's wife and she was beautiful. So her demands became stronger and stronger, but she did not know what to want. So all she tried to do, because at parties people never paid attention to her, mostly because Banan's relatives and friends, most of them were from the Qajar dynasty, they were *shahzadeh*. and they would not receive her as equal. So that's why for *sizdeh bedar* she did not want to go with him. She said, I'm not welcome there, and I don't like them. I hate these people. I say, you should not go there with them, you should go with us. Because she had a brother who had a bakery shop. And she came from a baking family, actually. But Banan couldn't go with them. So she wanted to take Banan to her side for *sizdeh bedar* and Banan didn't care if she went or not, because he was going with us. So that's why the things didn't happen. So immediately after the second marriage was the third one, which ended up something like 36, 37.

V: And around 1340-41 the fourth marriage came along. She was wife of an army general who was head of Savak in the province of Mazandaran in the city of Sari. And Banan used to go to the Caspian very often. And I think somehow they met there around the Caspian and then she got a divorce from her husband and after a year or two married Banan. That was the last one, actually. And she really loved him. They had problems at the beginning and once even they had a fight. Any time anything thing like that happened they both came to my place. Because his wife was a good friend to my sister and Banan was very close to me. Earlier she had come there, saying that she was fed up with Banan, she cannot stay with him any longer because he was getting old, and nagging, eating much, and getting sick, and so forth. And all of a sudden Banan came over, so we had to hide her. We didn't want him to know that she was there. She didn't want him to know that she was there. So Banan came, so she was in one other room. Then I called a friend of mine and I said, Banan and I am coming to your place and try to keep us overnight because I knew that she was going to stay with my sister overnight. So we went there and at the end of the evening I played a trick and I told Banan that Pari was there this morning and she says that she has so much respect for you, that this respect actually overshadows her love for you and she thinks that she that doesn't deserve you and she thinks that you have to be free like a bird, not to have to come home anytime because you have a wife there. So she said the only way she could convince you for a divorce was to make you think that she was terrible. So she tried to act like that, though she loved you deeply. But she tried to change your love into hate, actually, for her, so that there could be a divorce. And, actually, when I told these things, there were tears in his eyes. And I played the same trick the following day. When Banan was asleep over there, early in the morning I got up and rushed back to my sister's house. And I told her that's what Banan said, that you're too young for him and he's old now and she doesn't have much time for you and the only way that he could convince you to go for a divorce

was to treat you badly, so that you would hate him instead of loving him. So she started to cry. So about lunchtime, we brought them back together and they really lived happily ever after. Because these things that I told him, it was a fact in a way. So they never forgot that. They remembered that, and so they tried to negotiate, and especially she, she was more giving than Banan. He didn't have much chance to give. And she remained his wife until. And she had two children from her previous marriage and these two children treated Banan really like their father.

P: So he had this wife for a life time.

V: Yeah, for a long time. She came from Sa'adat family in Shiraz, who started hotels in Shiraz. Hotel-e Saadet Ruz [?], number one. And then when Mosadeq came and the British were ousted, the consulate, he bought. It was Darvaze Quran, he made a beautiful hotel out of it. And she belonged to that family. She's very nice. She really appreciated Banan and enjoyed his singing. She treated him as a gentleman and he was really proud of her also. Because Banan was very sloppy and she gradually brought some discipline into him.

P: He was sloppy in what way?

V: He didn't care about what he wore. Because normally he dressed up beautifully, I mean he cared for what he wore. But normally before he did singing, he did not drink much, he did not eat much, very little, maybe a small shot of vodka and a little bit of cheese, things like that. And after that he started to drink and eat. By the time he got back he was really loaded. And normally, if he didn't throw everything, he did it artificially. He would throw everything he had eaten. And then he always had in the icebox *áb-e anár*, *áb-e ronáz*, all of these *abs* that are predominant in Iran, vegetable juice. Had them, *ab-e hendeváneh*. He normally got really dirty so she had to clean him up and put him back to bed. But in the morning, he was fine. He was healthy again.

P: So did he do this every night?

V: Practically every night.

P: Well, how often did he go to parties and sing?

V: He actually went to parties, not to sing. Invitations maybe once a week. Originally, he avoided them. He tried to spend his time mostly with friends. He chose his friends, where to go. And, of course, our house was one of them, and if he wanted to go to any other parties, he would go with my brother or with me if I had time to go with him. Normally he was not happy without any one of us. He was at home with us. Because he knew we loved him and we respected him and we appreciated him. And we knew, actually, who he was. So he was very pleased and was very at home with us. And my mother really loved him.

V: Actually, he was a friend to my father and my brother met him through my father in the year 1305. My father was in charge of a development project in the Caspian and Banan worked for him as a young man. And he started to work with my father, at the Ministry of Finance or Agriculture, I don't know which one. And then my brother went there for the summer vacations, and there he met Banan as a young man, and then friendship developed between them. He worked there and some time he worked along the Persian Gulf at the company that you mentioned, Iranbar. Who was headed by my brothers's

father-in-law, Mr. Rokni, which was his uncle also, Iraj Mirza Rokni, he was head of the Iranbar, and he hired Banan to work with him because he loved his voice.

V: And then when he moved to Tehran, it was when the radio started.

P: Did he start working for radio part-time?

V: Part-time, yes.

P: While he was doing these other things?

V: Right. At that time radio didn't pay much. He had to work for the government. And then when he became head of a division at the Ministry of Foodstuff, headed by Mr. Farrokh. So Farrokh sent him a message through my father, that if he wants to continue with his career with the government, he has to stop going to parties, especially singing at parties and besides he had promised his father not to adopt a singing career. He reminded him of that. So he chose singing. So, he resigned from government services and he started singing.

V: That was when they hired him as a teacher for *honarestán* and also gave him a job at the Ministry of Education as a teacher. He was drawing salary from there also. And, of course, In those days, life was so cheap back in Iran. And besides, all he needed was an apartment just to have his things there. Otherwise he spent most of his evenings at friends' houses. But when he was married, during his marriages, he was a very responsible person, very proud. If, for example, somebody invited him for singing, he had to invite them back, and try to entertain them much heavier. In other words, if they had three kinds of food on the table, he had to put six kinds of food, just to show them that he was a prince, that he was generous, that he was hospitable, and so forth.

V: So, from then on, he became actually a member of our family. And I was a young boy. I enjoyed his voice. I was very shy and I never went to their parties. I listened mostly to his voice on the radio. Except in the late maybe 1350's. he went to parties. He was invited and he was paid.

P: He was paid at the parties that he went to?

V: At the parties, yeah.

P: And you mentioned he'd go to parties about once a week or more?

V: Once a week, yes, I mean to formal parties, as an invitation. Otherwise he would rather choose his singing places, where he wanted to go. And, of course, it had to do with some, there were certain households in Tehran, where there were certain beautiful ladies there and he normally chose those places. Because they were wives of his friends or sisters of his friends, as Persian, he just felt love for them inside. For example, I didn't know, Shahbaz told me, that he had been in love with my sister all his life, but he never mentioned it, I mean my younger sister, who died. Anyway, so much for his social life.

P: Like, for instance, he would go to a formal party about once a week and he was paid for that?

V: Yes.

P: And then he would go about how many nights a week to informal gatherings?

V: Almost every night.

P: And would he sing at these informal gatherings?

V: Yes.

P: And would he do the same method as you described ...

V: Right, sometimes he would call, very rarely he would call me to go and play with him if he couldn't find anyone else just by accident. Normally it was Mr. Tajbakhsh, Mahmud Tajbakhsh,

P: Tajbakhsh that played for him? At the parties?

V: Right. Varzandeh, even more than Tajbakhsh. 'Cause he didn't care much for Tajbakhsh's style of performing violin. And then, when Parviz Yahaqi and Majd and Kasa'i all came to Tehran, so they were always at all those parties. So when radio started, Kasa'i and Jalil Shahnaz they came from Esfahan and then Parviz Yahaqi had become widely known, was the fashion of the day and everybody tried to copy Parviz Yahaqi. So all these parties in the city of Tehran that Banan went to, somebody was there anyway. If by accident there wasn't anybody, he would arrange beforehand with the host to have. And sometime around 10 o'clock in the evening, it happened maybe less than five times throughout our relationship, he called me that I am coming to pick you up, and we are going to such and such a place, they are nice people. So he knew I was shy. I couldn't play or perform just everywhere. But normally at parties he went, the host would have invited others, some performers. And lately, what I found out, that in order to attract him, because he loved Parviz Yahaqi, so they would invite Parviz Yahaqi, and let him know somehow so that Banan would choose to go to that party himself. Because they knew if they invited him, he always finds some reason not to go. He wanted to make his own choice.

V: And one day, a very nice incident. He was staying with us the night before the party and we both got sick, it was the food or something. The following afternoon, he said, let's go out for a walk. So we walked from Meidan-e Kakh towards the American Embassy on Takht-e Jamshid. And half along the way, a car stopped, with a jerking sound, was a harsh brake. And somebody rushed out of the car and said, Banan, I was looking for you in the sky. I find you now here on the ground, and so forth. We have so and so at my place tonight and we are all looking for you all over the place to invite you there. He said, oh, Mr. So and So is there, oh, so badly I want to meet him, I want to see him. Made him sure he would show up because he had his own reason to be there. But I knew in the evening we had something going on at my own place. So, of course, I didn't say anything. And afterwards, I said, how did you promise? You know that Majd is coming tonight and we have this and that. He said, don't worry, these people, unless they get your positive answer, they won't give up. If I tell them that I have diarrhea, they say they will put up a European toilet for you, in the middle of the hall. If you say, I cannot walk, they say, we bring you a stretcher. So I give them the yes, so that they leave me alone and I don't go. So after two, three times they get mad, they get angry, and they leave me alone. Because he was right. There were only seven nights a week and so many houses, all with parties, throughout Tehran. And they all wanted him. He couldn't divide himself. So he had to get rid of some of them, somehow.

P: Well, who would usually accompany him, in these parties, or was there any usual person?

V: Normally it was Varzandeh. It was hard for the performers to follow Banan. And he didn't enjoy a performer unless he understood him. So Varzandeh and Majd, these two were the two top companions of him who could follow him note by note and he enjoyed to have his own voice repeated and you can hear it through the tapes that we have. Majd and Varzandeh, and Parviz Yahaqi of course. Parviz Yahaqi,

he liked him, as a person, he liked his performance. Sometimes he would not even sing, but he was willing to listen to him to get prepared to do his best work afterwards.

V: And again, you knew the clashes, between Esfahanis and Tehranis, because Esfahani performers, like Jalil and Kasai, they thought that the musicians in Tehran, they are nothing: the best singer was Taj Esfahani, and the best *tar* player was Jalil and the best *nai* player was Kasai, which was accidentally true. So Banan didn't like them, because he knew that somehow they would try to show off rather than follow him in singing. They would try to overpower the audience with their performance rather than Banan's singing. And this always created clashes.

V: I remember once, I haven't been there, but I heard the story. Have you heard about Javadieh?

P: Javadieh?

V: Javadieh was a village out of Tehran towards Tehran Pars and so forth, before Tehran Pars and Narmak was created. Out in middle of nowhere, there was a big garden. It belonged to Arbab Mehdi Yazdi—it was called Javadieh. It had a beautiful fountain and he had created two big halls and a *howzkhaneh* and water came from *qanat* and opened up in *howzkhaneh*. And he had a dining table which could cover something like about 80 people and he had his own freezer by ice. Anytime in the evening you could go there and they had always shesh kabab for you, chicken kabob. That was a place for entertainment. That was his business actually because a lot of negotiations took place there. So he had that place for his business. And mostly all these parties took place there. And Banan was there, and Morteza Mahjubi was there. And once, there, Kasai had tried to trick Banan, to make it difficult for him to sing. And since Banan knew the range of *nai*, he changed the subject and started to sing at a place that he couldn't play. So these clashes were going on and on. So, he had his own choice. He would have Varzandeh, Majd, and, of course, Parviz Yahaqi.

P: But Varzandeh was kind of first.

V: Yes. Because there was one more reason for Varzandeh to be at all these places. Because Varzandeh, he had no problem with him. When he walked in, he knew that he was there to play. He would bring out his santur and start to play. Except when he wanted to eat or drink, then went back to his instrument again. So he had no problem with him, that "*halesho nadaram*". *Nedanam*, "*ya chera un nemizanim*"⁷. Always *halesho dasht*. Always. So he would go with Varzandeh, and he did, of course, his best work with Majd. So Majd was also there.

P: What about Mahjubi?

V: Mahjubi was a problem, because piano was not everywhere. Mostly he was in Javadieh. They had two grand pianos there and they were tuned for Persian music, and a number of other places that Mahjubi was invited and then Banan also.

P: Now when you say he had formal invitations, how were those different?

⁷ I'm not in the mood, I don't know, why don't we play that one

V: They were parties organized for some reason. Somebody became a minister they were being given a party in his honor. There was an occasion. It was a formal party so they would call him and he had to go there dressed up.

P: And he was paid a fee for that?

V: Right. Indirectly, not directly.

P: But he wasn't paid for the other parties, was he?

V: No. For friendly parties, no. If he needed money, he would borrow from those who had the money and never paid them back. They didn't expect to be paid back either. He had a very simple life, he did not have much to spend on. He didn't need money like that.

[Here, we are going over an article about Banan in Persian, which Varzi is reading and translating]

V: He was a clerk at the archives department of the Ministry of Agriculture. That was the beginning of his employment, 1315. After some time, he was transferred to Iranbar Company in Ahvaz. It was private, semi-government. It was some government which had to be run commercially, so they made separate entities of out them. After some years he became assistant director of that office. 1322. That's when Ahvaz was invaded, occupied by the American forces. 1322 that's the year when they closed that office. Then in 1322 he became a private secretary to Farrokh, the Ministry of Food. Then there was a shuffling in the cabinet and Farrokh was not Minister of Food anymore. So he was transferred to one of the head offices in the Ministry of the Interior, Grain and Bread. Then he was the acting director of the administrative office and personnel and also after some time he was acting as director of coupon distribution office. So in 1332 he was hired by the Ministry of Fine Arts, as a teacher of *avaz*, of Honarestan-e Musiqi-ye Melli, based on the recommendation of Khaleqi.

P: We were talking about his evenings, how he performed and who he performed for and who he performed with. He performed with other singers. Did he perform with Delkash?

V: You mean at the radio?

P: Together.

V: I don't think so, no. He had one with Marzieh, just once, maybe twice with Marzieh.

P: For instance, during the daytime, what would he do normally, during the week?

V: Since he went home late in the evening, he would spend all morning at home practically. He would get up late. He was very lazy in morning, because of what had happened the night before. He took his time to get dressed and to get ready to come out. And then normally in those days, there were two places that people went. It was Sar-e Pol, Tajrish, mostly weekends. And sometimes there was a coffee shop on Lalezar-e Now, that they all gathered there, it was a haunting place. So he went to those places, or Café Lalezar, which intellectuals actually gathered there, like Sadeq Hedayat and so forth. So it was Café Lalezar, it was Café Naderi and Shirineh Forushi Nushin where they had for the first time they had French coffee there. So he haunted these places or just walked along Lalezar and Istanbul which is a promenade. And then very often I saw him, of course in those days I was young. We were not friends actually, but I said hello, things like that. There was a *sandwichi*, *khachik*. It was very well known in Tehran, actually. It was on Istanbul. It was one of those *pasages*. That was also when people wanted

some snack. They came there for beer and *sandwich-e morgh* or *sandwich-e salad olivieh*. *Salad olivieh* was very known. And then from there naturally you meet certain people and by then you go to somebody's house and then sometimes they continued there in the evening. Or sometimes from there they decided where they wanted to go. So they picked up a place, made a phone call, and they went there. And normally he made his own decision where he wanted to go in evening. He had to compile with his mood and with his—he was very selfish and very proud and normally he chose places where there was a chance of a beautiful girl coming also.

P: So he lived according to some internal promptings.

V: Right. Internal impulses.

P: When did he do his work for Honarestan and Radio and Anjoman-e Musiqi and all of those things.

V: Anjoman-e Musiqi Melli was in the garden in Khiaban-e Hedayat and that was mostly in the evenings—some evenings actually.

P: That was a volunteer organization...

V: Right. Somebody let their house to be used for Anjoman-e Musiqi Melli because had no other place. They had no funds.

P: Did he go there regularly? Was he regularly performing at those gatherings?

V: Right. They were two prominent singers, 'Abd al 'Ali Vaziri and Banan. And 'Abd al 'Ali Vaziri started singing Colonel Vaziri's pieces, and then when Banan came, so they switched. They give him to sing, because 'Abd al 'Ali Vaziri didn't do a good job. But 'Abd al 'Ali Vaziri was a new note, he was a nephew of Colonel Vaziri, he played the *tar*, so he had a command over music, because he could read music, but his voice, he didn't have a good voice.

P: So that's how 'Abd al 'Ali came to know Banan,

V: Right.

P: Is through Anjoman-e Musiqi Melli somehow, because through 'Abd al 'Ali, Banan came to Radio.

V: Well, actually 'Abd al 'Ali Vaziri was the nephew of his wife. They were related. 'Abd al 'Ali was Colonel Vaziri's nephew. Banan's wife was his wife, actually.

END OF VARZI INTERVIEW ON BANAN TAPE 1